

# MAGNOLIA MESSENGER



The Friends of Magnolia Cemetery

*"Remove not the ancient Landmark"*

Winter 2011

## *A Tale of Two Taylors*

In the financial and social upheaval that followed the end of the Civil War, many Southerners moved looking for new opportunities. One such family was that of Richard Nixon Taylor, a North Carolinian whose fortunes had soured at war's end.

Some families vanished into obscurity. The family of Richard Taylor and his wife Susan, would produce two prominent but quite different sons. One would excel in the field of law, become a passionate Roman Catholic and be appointed the nation's first ambassador to Spain. The other, a life-long Baptist, had a special talent for numbers and a winning personality that made him a popular politician and mayor of Mobile.

### **A Move to Alabama**

The couple's older son, Hannis, was born in 1851 and was studying at the University of North Carolina in 1869 when his father's store failed. At about the same time, Mrs. Taylor and their five year old daughter contracted TB. When young Hannah died in June a doctor advised the Taylors to move to a drier climate. In July of 1869 the family moved to Point Clear, Alabama. Just why they thought a near tropical region known for its occasional hurricanes would be "drier" has apparently been lost to time.

After leaving the University of North Carolina Hannis apparently never entered college again. Richard Taylor went to work in a turpentine facility in Baldwin County. Mrs. Taylor died in December and after his



**Hannis Taylor**

*The elder of the two brothers, Hannis, passed the bar in 1870 and went on to be a renowned jurist. He had the honor of reigning over Mobile's Mardi Gras in 1887 and was appointed the nation's first ambassador to Spain in 1893.*

*Photo Courtesy of the USA Archives*

father lost his job Hannis brought the family to Mobile.

Hannis had studied law with a North Carolina attorney for a year. Upon reaching Mobile he studied law once more and was able to pass the bar in 1870.

The 1870 Mobile City Directory showed that Hannis was residing at the corner of St. Joseph and St. Louis streets while working for the law firm of Anderson & Bond. The following year found him a practicing attorney with an office at 54 Dauphin Street and his residence at 30 Monroe Street.

Although his income was modest he was able to rent a house for his father and siblings. His father remarried less than a year after his mother's death and the couple left for Mississippi with Hannis' four youngest brothers.

### **The Poet Priest as Matchmaker**

By the mid-70's Hannis Taylor had joined forces with Alfred Goldthwaite with offices at 36 St. Francis Street. He purchased a house near the corner of Lafayette Street and Old Shell Road. St. Mary's Catholic Church and its rectory was across the road and in 1876, Father Abram Ryan had become its minister.

Although raised a Baptist, Hannis Taylor was never a member of a church in Mobile. He found himself making friends with a number of Catholics in Mobile, especially John Rapier, the editor of the Mobile

Register. Hannis was soon writing articles for the paper dealing with law and politics.

When Father Abram Ryan was transferred to St. Mary's, Hannis would occasionally attend services there and often visited the priest with whom he discussed religion. It was the famous priest who introduced him to a 19 year old parishioner named Leonora LeBaron. The two were wed on May 8, 1878. Leonora was well educated and a good match for the young Taylor. Her father was a distinguished local cotton broker who would have the honor of serving as Mobile's consul to Spain, France, Mexico and Nicaragua. The couple would have six children including Hannis Joseph, a Georgetown Law School graduate and Mary Lillie who married Dr. Reid Hunt, a long time professor in Harvard's medical school.

Father Ryan was well known for his poetry, earning his title of "Poet Priest of the Confederacy." It was Hannis Taylor who convinced him that the poems warranted publication. With the help of his friend John Rapier, the book was published in 1879 and would go through a total of 40 printings. The preface of that book credits "a young attorney" with its publication.

Father Ryan died in a Louisville friary in 1886 and it was Hannis Taylor who arranged to have his friend embalmed and brought to Mobile for burial in Catholic Cemetery following a service at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception.



*Father Ryan, the celebrated "Poet Priest of the Confederacy" was a neighbor and friend of Hannis Taylor. Ryan introduced Taylor to his future bride and it was Hannis Taylor who convinced Ryan to publish his popular poems in what became a best selling volume. - Photo Courtesy of the USA Archives*

### The Dissolution of Mobile

Following the 1877 death of Mayor Alphonse Hurtel, an election was held. George Duffee defeated the popular candidate. Duffee had been supported by a coalition of Republicans and reformists calling themselves



*This circa 1910 photo shows Colonel and Mrs. R.V. Taylor (seated at center) flanked by their daughter Helen on the left, and daughter in law, Annie May (Mrs. Adrian Taylor) on the right. On the back row (left to right) are their sons, William Buck, Richard Vipon, Jr. and Adrian. Only two of Colonel Taylor's grandchildren survive: Helen's son, J. Lloyd Abbot, Jr. of Mobile and William Buck Taylor, Jr. of Montrose, Ala.*

*Photo Courtesy of the USA Archives*

the People's Party. The city's finances had never recovered from the 1873 panic and the city was about to default on interest payments. A disaster was looming.

Hannis Taylor at age 27 joined with seasoned Mobile attorneys John Little Smith and Peter Hamilton to draft bills to allow the Alabama legislature's involvement in the situation. Their bill passed in February of 1879 and the result was that the city's charter was revoked. The city of Mobile ceased to exist. It was reincorporated as the Port of Mobile and Mayor Duffee was out of a job.

The mayor and council had been replaced by a police board made up of eight commissioners. The city's budget was reduced drastically as were Mobile's city limits.

Three commissioners were appointed by the governor to tackle the city's debt. Within a year arrangements had been made with the majority of the city's creditors, paying them roughly half what was owed to them over a 25-year period. Ironically those who refused the arrangement sued the city and were eventually awarded the entire amount owed them.

### Pompano and an Elephant

Throughout the 1880's Taylor's law practice expanded and prospered. He had been admitted to practice at

the Alabama Supreme Court in 1872 and the U. S. Supreme Court in 1885. His knowledge of constitutional and international law was impressive and unrivaled.

He was known for his love of fine dining with broiled pompano a favorite. His knowledge of European wines was exceptional: it was said that he could give the exact origin of a wine from just one sip. In 1887 he was selected to rule over Mobile's Carnival as its Emperor. A born showman, he paraded into town on the back of an elephant. The fact that a North Carolina transplant was afforded this sort of honor surely reflects on his local popularity.

In 1893 President Grover Cleveland appointed Hannis Taylor Ambassador to Spain, a post he filled in Madrid until 1897. The family moved back to Mobile in 1898 where they resided on the north side of Dauphin Street, just east of Georgia Avenue.

Taylor's law practice never rebounded from his absence. Many of his clients had found other attorneys and in 1902 after an unsuccessful stab in the coal business, the 51 year old Taylor and his family decided to move to Washington, D. C.

A farewell banquet took place at Simon Klosky's Delmonico Restaurant on Conti Street. The meal included broiled pompano and toasts lasted a full hour.

He spent his final years as an attorney in Washington D.C. where he was also a professor of law at Georgetown University. The Taylors lived on fashionable "O" Street and counted Teddy Roosevelt among their friends. He finally converted to Catholicism and began attending Mass.

Hannis Taylor died at his Washington home the day after Christmas, 1922 at the age of 71. He was buried in Fort Lincoln Cemetery in Maryland.

### **Richard Vipon Taylor**

Mobile's Mayor, R. V. Taylor was eight years his brother Hannis' junior. When the family moved to Alabama he was in grammar school and finished in Mobile at Barton Academy. His mother had died from TB in 1870 when he was 11 and his older brother Hannis, became the head of the household.

R. V. Taylor never attended college but reportedly had a head for figures. At the age of 18 he went to work in the accounting department of the Mobile and Ohio Railroad. The year was 1877 and the railroad was emerging from bankruptcy under the guidance of Colonel E. L. Russell.



*Helen Buck Taylor grew up in this raised cottage on Springhill Avenue in suburban Summerville. The Buck family had acquired the property in 1861 when its owner left for Texas following one of the shortest marriages in Mobile history.*

*Photo Courtesy of the USA Archives*

His original position was that of bookkeeper but he was soon named Chief Clerk. In August of 1882 he married Helen Buck, the daughter of William A. Buck and the former Margaret Langdon.

### **The Bucks and a House with a Past**

William Amos Buck was a Pennsylvania transplant who had prospered as a cotton broker and later served as secretary of the Factors and Traders Insurance Company in Mobile. The family moved to suburban Summerville in 1861 in a house known as Shell Cottage for its shell driveway. The house still stands at 1818 Springhill Avenue.

Shell Cottage had a rather sad past. It had once been prepared by John Elliot for his bride "Frank" Crawford. The new Mrs. Elliott took her mother along on the honeymoon and when the trip was over she went home with mama and filed for divorce. Elliot sold the house to the Bucks and moved to Texas. His former wife married Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt and is responsible for the original funding and founding of Vanderbilt University. A subsequent owner of the house hanged himself in its attic.

City directories first list the Taylors as residing in Summerville, with no address given. They may have been living with the Bucks or had another house in the area. By 1890, R. V. Taylor had been named General Auditor of the railroad and their address was listed as 14 South Broad Street. No photos exist of that house but the Sanborn Fire Map reveals a spacious one story home on the north west corner of Conti and Broad streets.

The couple had four children. Adrian, the oldest, served as a resident surgeon at Johns Hopkins Hospital until 1920 when he moved to China to head the surgi-

cal department of Peking Union Medical College. R. V., Jr. also ended up in China as a medical missionary before returning to Mobile where he practiced medicine. Their third son was William Buck, a Mobile banker and later postmaster and their youngest was daughter Helen Buck (later Mrs. J. Lloyd Abbot, Sr.).

### **The New Century**

The twentieth century opened with Mobile's prosperity as a port well established and growing. The Mobile and Ohio Railroad profited and in 1907 was able to construct their impressive terminal in the Spanish Mission style of architecture. The whole city shut down for its grand opening.

The Taylors had moved to 910 Government Street and "Colonel Dick" as he was popularly known had been promoted to Vice President and General Manager of the Mobile and Ohio Railroad in 1904.

The house at 910 Government dated to 1854 and is in a classic Greek Revival style. City fire maps indicate the Taylors enlarged the house twice. First a wing to the north appeared on the 1904 map and later maps show an eastern wing which housed a large dining room with bedrooms above.

### **The Old Homestead**

The family purchased a house at Point Clear in October of 1909. The large raised cottage with dormer windows dated to the 1850's and had belonged to a cousin of Mrs. Taylor's. As a result they dubbed the place "the Old Homestead." It became the center of the family's activities for the next 30 years.

Mrs. Taylor was a devoted member of the newly constructed First Baptist Church of Mobile. In the summers her spacious bay front porch was the setting for a well attended Bible study on Wednesday mornings, as well as a Sunday school for children followed by an evening service for friends and neighbors.

### **Caesar**

Colonel Taylor was a typical gentleman of the period, enjoying card games that often lasted well into the night. These usually took place at the Athelstan Club and the waiters seldom let a glass stay empty for long. On one late evening the Colonel was in a particularly good mood and brought a couple of his comrades home for a nightcap.

As he fumbled about the decanters, laughing and telling jokes, one of his companions suggested they better keep it down or they would wake Mrs. Taylor. In a booming voice Taylor announced, "Gentlemen, in

this house I am Caesar!"

Almost on cue, his diminutive bride appeared in the doorway in her robe. She bid the men good evening and told her husband's guests "Gentlemen you are always welcome here. You may stay as long as you like and make yourselves at home, but Caesar is going to bed!!"

Mardi Gras of 1911 was especially memorable for the Taylors. Daughter Helen was chosen to be Queen that year. The railroad was profitable and the family enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle with winters on Government Street and summers at Point Clear.

### **A Federal Post**

In 1918 with World War I raging, Taylor left the Mobile and Ohio to accept a federal appointment. He was named Federal Manager of major railways in three southern states and held that position until war's end. Rather than returning to the railroad, he entered politics and became Mobile's mayor in 1922 and in 1926 was appointed by President Coolidge to the Interstate Commerce Commission. Much of his work led to the eventual creation of the Alabama State Docks.

He had also promoted the construction of a large bridge to connect Mobile with the eastern shore. His efforts would ultimately lead to the construction of the Cochrane Bridge and the Bankhead Tunnel. Taylor also advocated the development of Dauphin Island as well as a bridge to connect it to the mainland.

### **A New Bank**

The Taylor's third son, William, worked for the Merchants National Bank, but eventually ventured out on his own and established the Mobile National Bank. A building on the west side of St. Joseph Street, just opposite the newly completed skyscraper of the Merchants' was obtained and outfitted as the most modern of banks. Newspaper accounts showed the new lobby overflowing with floral arrangements sent by well-wishers and depositors.

Almost before those flowers could fade, Wall Street had crashed, setting off a chain of events that would leave Mobile and the nation in a financial depression. Colonel Taylor had invested heavily in the new bank and his fortune essentially vanished. He also made great efforts to pay back friends who had invested in the bank or opened accounts, leaving the family in greatly reduced circumstances. The bank is last listed in the 1931 city directory.

It is likely that the colonel had held onto his Mobile and Ohio Railroad stock which had been paying divi-



The R. V. Taylors purchased this ante-bellum home at 910 Government Street and enlarged it twice. The circa 1910 wing containing the dining room is at the right. Miraculously the house has survived hurricanes, a recent fire and commercial encroachment. Their home at Point Clear was not as lucky.

*Photo Courtesy of the USA Archives*

dends through 1928. None was declared in 1929 and by 1932 the line would have a \$2.2 million deficit, making the stock worthless.

The house on Government Street was subdivided into apartments with Colonel and Mrs. Taylor occupying the main floor. The dining room was converted into their bedroom.

### A New Decade

Taylor was elected to the City Commission in 1931 and served again as the city's mayor in 1933-34 and 1936-37. He assisted with the refinancing of municipal debt and kept the city from defaulting on its obligations. Ironically his older brother had worked on the same problem some 50 years earlier.

Richard Vipon Taylor died at his beloved bay house on December 23, 1939. He was 70 years old. City Hall was draped in black and flags hung at half mast throughout the city. His funeral was held at First Baptist Church and afterward he was buried in Magnolia Cemetery.

The Old Homestead was foreclosed on by creditors soon after Taylor's death. Thus ended thirty years of family memories. Out of respect for the colonel they had waited their time but they had to be paid eventual-

ly. The house sat vacant and forlorn, a victim of vandalism until war's end. When construction workers could finally be obtained the new owner found the house to be beyond repair and had it demolished.

The fine house on Government Street later became home to the Taylor's daughter, Helen and her husband,



William Buck Taylor opted for banking rather than following his older brothers into the field of medicine. With capital from his parents and family friends he opened the Mobile National Bank on the west side of St. Joseph Street, just north of Bienville Square. Timing could not have been worse. The doors opened in the fall of 1929 and soon plunged the family into financial straights.

*Photo Courtesy of the USA Archives*

Captain J. Lloyd Abbot. Recently restored following a disastrous fire it proudly stands on Government Street despite the roar of traffic and commercial intrusion nearby.

*Tom McGehee*

*For further information on Hannis Taylor see "Hannis Taylor: The New Southerner as an American" by Tennant S. McWilliams.*

### Grave Spaces for Sale

The following spaces are available within Magnolia Cemetery. Call us for further information.

Square 28 lot 122 (2 spaces)

Square 29, Cremation spaces



### Looking for a Gift?

If you know someone interested in Mobile's history, why not give them a gift of a membership in the Friends of Magnolia Cemetery? Their membership will help preserve this historic site and provide them with a year's subscription to the Messenger with its historical insights.

*Please*

***Don't forget your Friends!***

**Renew Your Membership Today**

**THANKS!**

**(We regret that as a non-profit agency we cannot afford to send newsletters if your membership has expired.)**

### *Lest We Forget*

The Friends of Magnolia Cemetery is the sole beneficiary from the sale of Harry Myers' book *Lest We Forget*. All proceeds go into the Perpetual Care Trust Fund, due to the generosity of his sons who made it possible for the book to be published.

Order Form for *Lest We Forget* by Harry E. Myers

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■ Books are \$25 when picked up at Magnolia Cemetery or \$29 when mailed.

■ Make checks payable to Friends of Magnolia Cemetery.

■ Mail your order to Friends of Magnolia Cemetery, P.O. Box 6383, Mobile, AL 36660. The Friends' office is located at 1202 Virginia Street. If you need additional information call (251) 432-8672.

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- Please contact me to work on volunteer projects.

## President's Message

It is hard to imagine that the Friends of Magnolia Cemetery will celebrate its 25th anniversary this year. A dedicated group of volunteers was properly outraged that the city's largest historic cemetery had been allowed to fall into chaotic ruin. With assistance from the Historic Mobile Preservation Society an idea was born.

Monies allocated annually by the city to maintain the site were turned over to the new organization which hired its own superintendent and crew. Suddenly far more than roadways were being cleared of decades' worth of towering weeds and vines. Slowly beautiful monuments, obelisks and angels could be seen and appreciated. What an amazing contrast to the monotony of the "modern" cemetery with its uniform granite markers!

Soon Mobilians were able to rediscover this treasure. Guided tours on foot and more recently on bicycle allow us to appreciate a wide array of 19th century funerary art as well as to learn of the incredible Mobilians buried here. We have a veritable who-was-who here – from generals to bank presidents to prominent ministers. And we have humble inhabitants who lie in unmarked graves. All deserve the respect this organization is committed to giving them and their final resting place.

This is also a time to remember some of the dedicated early volunteers who made this organization such a success, such as the late Emily Hearin, Helen Wilson, and Arch Winter, to name just a few. As you can see by the names of our board members, we continue to be blessed with talented individuals who give their time to this organization and its important role.

Today under the capable watch of our Executive Director, Janet Savage and our Superintendent, Mark Halseth, the cemetery is in excellent shape. Thank you for your support as a Friend and as winter finally fades make a trip out to see how well the cemetery is looking. You won't be disappointed.

*Tom McGehee*  
*President*

## Memorials to the Perpetual Care Trust Fund

### *In Honor of . . .*

Margaret Hillard  
(On Your birthday)

### *In Memory of . . .*

Margaret Abbot

Elizabeth R. Bailey

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The Friends of Magnolia Cemetery

## Upcoming Events of Local Interest:

Mobile's Historic Homes Tour 2011 – A Look at Historic Government Street • March 17-19, 2011

Thursday, March 17: Evening Lecture at Oakleigh

Local architectural historian Cart Blackwell will discuss his research on noted Mobile architect George B. Rogers, with an emphasis on Rogers' Spanish Mission style of architecture.

Friday, March 18: Evening Lecture at the Mobile Public Library on Government Street.

Tom McGehee will present a slide lecture revealing "The Lost Architecture of Mobile's Most Famous Thoroughfare: Government Street." Champagne reception to follow.

Tours of historic homes and churches will take place on Friday and Saturday as well as readings of the works of author Eugene Walters and playwright Tennessee Williams. Saturday, March 19th will include walking tours of Magnolia Cemetery.

For further details please call the Historic Mobile Preservation Society at (251) 432-6161.

**THE FRIENDS OF MAGNOLIA CEMETERY, INC.**

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